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TAGS: [PREL](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: HOLY SEE RESPONSE TO IRAN DEMARCHE: THINKING IT OVER

REF: (A) STATE 87682, (B) VATICAN 095 (C) VATICAN 051 and previous

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission,  
EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary. The Holy See will probably issue some kind of response to our Iran demarche, supporting a "diplomatic path" but falling well short of what we have asked. The Holy See remains reluctant to speak out publicly on Iran (or indeed on most geopolitical issues) and appears to take a milder view of Iran's statements and activities than does the USG. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) Charge d'affaires read ref A points June 2 to Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States (foreign minister equivalent). Charge also handed Lajolo a copy of Secretary Rice's May 31 statement on Iran. Lajolo was accompanied by Monsignor Franco Coppola, who took careful notes.

[¶3.](#) (C) Lajolo listened carefully and responded immediately by saying that the Holy See would be very unlikely to issue a statement as requested. The Holy See does not traditionally operate by public statements, he said, and particularly in this case would want to maintain its independent and neutral stance -- not because it favors Iran, but because it needs flexibility to respond to the situation. He added that with a proud nation like Iran, it would be counterproductive to put them in a corner with a public ultimatum. Nevertheless he said the Holy See always encourages diplomatic efforts and would consider what it might be able to say publicly in response to our request. In musing over this with Coppola, Lajolo seemed encouraged by the fact that the US is asking Iran only to "suspend" rather than "renounce" its enrichment/reprocessing activity.

[¶4.](#) (C) Lajolo repeated several times the importance of taking a "diplomatic" approach (meaning, as opposed to what he considers the USG's confrontational public approach). As for the substance of the US request, he said, the Holy See does not have the expertise to comment on the technical aspects of Iran's enrichment program, and cannot judge whether it is peaceful or not. As to President Ahmadinejad's menacing public statements toward Israel, Lajolo responded with an Italian proverb ("tra il dire e il fare c'e di mezzo il mare" -- literally, between saying a thing and doing it there's an ocean in between) indicating that the Holy See tended to take such statements more as rhetorical exaggerations for domestic purposes than as actual threats. The Iranian people, said Lajolo, are unsatisfied with the theocracy, but in solidarity with Ahmadinejad. Let's not risk strengthening that by provoking them through ultimatums, he said; let's not take a "schoolmaster's tone".

[¶5.](#) (C) Lajolo added confidentially that Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki asked (through the Iranian ambassador to the Holy See) about a month ago to visit the Holy See for an audience with Pope Benedict XVI and deliver a letter to the pope from Ahmadinejad (see ref B; Lajolo had not heard about any possible

Khamenei letter). Thus far the Holy See has not responded, prompting the Iranian charge here to complain; Lajolo said the Iranian mission here has "insisted, many times" on a response. The Holy See is now preparing to respond that Mottaki is welcome to come, but only to see Lajolo, who would undertake to deliver Ahmadinejad's letter to the pope. Lajolo indicated that the Holy See, in its dialogue with Iran, focuses on the welfare of the Iranian Christian community; he said that so far Iran has not/not sought to raise its relationship with the United States when talking with the Holy See.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) The Holy See clearly prefers to maintain its traditional low profile on controversial geopolitical issues. It also seems clear, if less explicit, that Lajolo takes a milder view of Iran and Ahmadinejad. Lajolo wrestled with the possibility of the Holy See's saying something publicly, consulting Coppola about it several times; judging from their comments and body language, the Holy See will probably try to issue some sort of positive response about the "diplomatic path", but it will certainly fall short of what we are asking. Lajolo did say that USG input (ref C) had been helpful to the Holy See and had influenced their own approach to Iran.

SANDROLINI